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ON SOME ASPECTS OF PREPARATORY WORK IN LATIN.*

The object of this address is not to bring a railing accusation against the prevailing methods of instruction in preparatory work in Latin, nor to advance new and startling theories in any direction, but only to stir up by way of remembrance minds already proved pure. I need not, therefore, set myself at this moment to the establishment of the claim of the ancient classics to a place, and to a prominent place, in our scheme of secondary education. I may simply assert, in such a company as this, without argument and without great danger of challenge or of contradiction, that the means by which man flashes a living thought into the soul of his neighbor is as deserving of earnest attention as the means by which he digests his breakfast ; that even to dig after Greek roots is as worthily absorbing a pursuit as to dive with a scalpel into the viscera of a cat ; that we may feel as intensely the swelling uplift of soul in tracing the undying character of mighty nations through their own utterances, as in learning to piece out the formulæ of salicylic aldehydes.

But a generation or more ago (possibly even later than that) people used to talk a good deal in a vague way about the 'mental discipline' gained by the study of the classics. As nearly as I have been able to get at the bottom of their notions about the matter, they imagined that if the boy spent a considerable part of his time for a considerable number of years in learning by heart long strings of words that start in alike but end differently, in reciting over and over again such meaningless formulas as 'ad-ante-con-in-inter-ob-post-prae-pro-sub-and-super-in-composition-govern-the-dative,' and in burdening his memory with the single English words standing after single Latin words in a dictionary, all to the end that he might be able to substitute orally English of more or less dubious excellence for Latin of undoubted excellence,—they seem to have imagined that if he did all this, he would thereby attain a degree of mental culture and spiritual enlightenment that could come in no other

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way. Their simple faith reminds one of that of our forefathers who said pious charms to cure the toothache, or of the man I met the other day who carries a horse-chestnut around in his pocket, not because he really believes, as his grandmother did, that it will ward off rheumatism, but because he thinks it well to be on the safe side. If the poor boy really gained 'culture' by that method, it is because the human mind, like the human stomach, can stand a great deal of abuse. There are other studies better fitted than the classics to train simply the memory—geometry is often taught, I believe, as though it were supposed to have that for its field,—there are other studies better fitted to train the faculty of demonstrative reasoning. What the study of Latin does in these directions it must do incidentally. What it can do directly is to train the mind in the ability to deal with the 'argument from probability ;' and in doing this it can quicken general taste and judgment, enlarge and broaden human sympathies by the study of a great and distant civilization, establish the real unity of the human race, and above all, kindle the fire of enthusiasm to impel the boy still further onward in the peculiarly rich and varied field open before him.

Now it may seem that the development of the boy in these directions is peculiarly the work of the college and the university. It is a lamentable fact that according to popular opinion the task in Latin of the preparatory school, or high school teacher, is simply to cram the boy full of certain facts so that he can pass certain examinations for admission to college. The gate to the college is supposed to stand with lowered portcullis and the entire faculty sitting on it, to hold it down against all comers, while the preparatory school teacher equips his boys with culverin and battering-ram to help them force an entrance. Now this is certainly a wrong idea. As a matter of fact there isn't any threatening portcullis at all, and the college faculty is only too glad to welcome inside all comers who are ready and able to avail themselves of the advantages offered. What we need to do, all of us, is to make common cause, to coöperate heartily, to communicate freely the one with the other, to emphasize the solidarity of Latin work, as of other studies, from *a* to *izzard*. 'Knowledge is Power,' our old copy-books used to tell us, and the deeper knowledge, doubtless the fuller power. But that mysterious and yet real something called 'education' or 'culture,' which has thus far eluded the

scalpel and microscope of the physical psychologist, is not a sudden flower. The man of culture does not burst forth into the world full armed. He is neither born nor made. He grows. And if he doesn't begin growing before he gets into college he does not have a fair chance ever to attain the full stature of his manhood. Culture is closely allied to growth, and the noting of an absolute point attained at any given moment is of far less importance than the existence of a healthy and vigorous growth proceeding from the very first moment. The teacher's work, then, is not simply to equip the boy with a modicum of facts *about* Latin. It is to make Latin a part of his life from the days when he first learns that the Romans knew that a star is bright, and a rose red, and a human heart warm. If Rome and Gaul, Cæsar and Cicero, Catiline and Aeneas, do not *live* before his eyes, the greatest possibility of Latin as a chief element in his education, has been thrown away. And unless Latin can be made a vital element of culture before the college course begins, what is its value to those who must pass from the high school or academy directly into business or trade? Do not, then, surrender this grandest possibility of the Latin teacher, nor hand it over to the college instructor, contenting yourselves with an attempt to familiarize the boy with the lifeless machinery of the language. 'This oughtest thou to have done, and not to have left the other undone.'

I have said this much by way of exhortation on what seems to me to be after all the most important element in the preparatory work in Latin. Now that my conscience is clear on this point, I can go on to the more prosy part of my subject.

This mysterious culture, this training of the judgment and the sensibilities by work in one direction so that they will respond immediately to demands in any other direction, cannot be developed merely by old-fashioned grammatical drill, however, necessary that is in its place. It can come only by teaching the boy to live and move and have his being for the time, among the Romans. And he cannot do this by reading about the Latin language. No Chatauqua system of the 'Latin Course in English' can ever help him to think the thoughts of the Romans after them, or to look at the life of that people from any other position than one outside the walls.

The ability of the boy to get 'culture' out of Latin, whether

in college or before he comes to college, depends primarily upon his ability to read the language itself,—I do not say to translate it, but to *read* it. And of course I do not mean by reading the oral or mental reproduction in order of the sounds indicated by the Latin letters, but the comprehension of the thought of the writer. Comprehension must as inevitably precede translation as the bud the flower. And in the case of a boy of average ability and command of his own language, translation will as naturally follow comprehension as the flower the bud. It is impossible to translate a Latin sentence before it is understood. And yet boys have been taught for generations past to attempt the impossible in this respect. And with what success? With what monstrosities of language professedly English does a Freshman class in Latin smite the ears of the long-suffering college tutor every September! The boys come from various schools; they have each his own especial variety of translation-English; but they agree in one particular. They have studied Latin three or four, or half-a-dozen years, and only one or two can *read* it. The rest 'get it out' (as they say) slowly and painfully, with the help of a dictionary, perhaps of a grammar, and tolerably often of a 'horse.' They get it out, indeed, (provided there is only a page or two of it), but it is frightfully misshapen and warped in the process. Language was once defined, I believe, by a skilled diplomatist, as an instrument for the concealment of thought. And such an instrument the Latin language is to the average Freshman, because translation has been to him an end in itself, and not merely, as it should be, an evidence that the end has been attained. He has been brought up to translate, but not to read.

If we are to project our minds into the minds of the Romans and to think their thoughts after them, we must evidently follow some other plan than this. We must aim first at the understanding of the original precisely as we grasp the meaning of a speaker or writer in our own language,—in the order in which the words come and without translation. The words and sentences must present their picture before our mind's eye immediately, and not intermediately. In short, we must, as far as we go, use the language as the Romans used it, and understand it as they understood it. Take a very simple example from the very beginning of Latin work, of the difference between the wrong and the right way. The beginner becomes aware that the Romans called that

object *sella*. How does he arrive at that conclusion? If in the wrong way, by a most portentous syllogistic process in which the dictionary takes a prominent part:—*sella* means *chair*; *chair* means that object; therefore, *sella* means that object;—and in nine cases out of ten from that time forward the Latin word will always suggest to his mind not *a* chair but the *word* chair. And so he takes two steps where he should take only one, and the second step takes him every time out of Latin, where we want to keep him, and into English. *Sella* ought to suggest to him immediately that thing, and *mulier* that, and *mensa* that, without any intervention of English. And the moment this step is achieved, that moment the first step is taken in the sympathetic perception of other people's minds which is so prominent an element in true culture. We need not wait for fruition till the boy can read complex sentences and grasp abstruse ideas. It begins at once.

I have said that the individual words first taught must present their pictures to the mind without the intervention of English. The case is a little more complex when we pass from single words to sentences, but the principle is the same as that followed nowadays in teaching children to read English. The brief sentences at first employed must not be subjected to fanciful dissection, but must flash their meaning out upon the mind at once, as undivided wholes. Let the work of dissection and analysis come afterward. Half of the battle lies in stimulating the boy's interest and courage, so that he won't stand blankly aghast before sentences of two words when he has had put before him thus far ideas contained in only a single word, nor before a sentence of ten words when the last sentence had only eight in it. When once he has caught the idea, you may rely upon it that he will not be inclined to take the more dull and laborious method of working through the English language, but will go straight to the mark. And the very style of his questions will change. No longer will he ask, "How do you translate *fragosus torrens*?" but, "What sort of a *torrens* is a *fragosus torrens*?" and the teacher will feel that a victory is gained. And what inspiration when he can read to his class, for example, the stirring words of Vergil,—*Haec ubi dicta, cauuum conuersa cuspidem montem impulit in latus; ac uenti velut agmine facto qua data porta ruunt et terras turbine perflant*, and perceive that the listeners see and hear the

stroke of the spear against the brazen doors, and the tumultuous outburst of the winged giants, and the roar of the billows, and the crash of the oars, and despairing shrieks of the sailors,—and have no thought about how to translate it.

But this sort goeth not forth save by unremitting toil, perseverance, and enthusiasm on the part of the teacher. We can't disguise that fact. Just as there is no royal road to learning, so there is no royal road to teaching. The day is so long past when the teacher, as he was called, could tell the boy to begin 'there' on the printed page and learn to 'there,' and next day could sit behind his desk and simply hear the boy say it off, that we smile at the bare recollection of it. The teacher's work is hard; to use our popular college slang, it's a 'grind'; the lamented Mr. Mantilini would call it a 'demd horrid grind.' But that does not frighten the true teacher, and I need not be afraid to admit here that to teach Latin as it deserves to be taught and ought to be taught *is* better than to teach it as it ought not to be taught. But over against the increased difficulty of teaching it well, set the additional stimulus to the teacher in feeling the alertness of perception and eagerness of comprehension on the part of his class, such as never could be kindled under the old wooden system of instruction. Here is something worth working for,—a toil that brings its own reward with it,—an utter subversion of the traditional dullness of the ordinary, every-day teacher's life.

But, some of you will say (for I hope I am talking to some teachers who are young enough not yet to have become that omniscient day-of-judgment person that we all tend to develop into)—some of you will say, 'I never was taught this way. How can I do all these fine things?' Why, my dear sir, or madam, when you and I get to be *perfect* teachers, the commonwealth won't think of keeping us at work on five hundred dollars, or so, a year. She will send us out to be exhibited at the World's Fair as the only specimens of the sort in the universe. And when we are sent back we shall find a position awaiting us in a glass case in some museum. Oh, no; we don't have to be *perfect* teachers in order to accomplish something. (All we need is, as our Methodist friends put it, to be going on toward perfection.)

And I am not going to prescribe any set formularies for teaching beginners. There is the widest opportunity for the development of individuality in method in the teaching of this as of almost every

subject under the sun. The only thing I would insist upon as unchangeable is the foundation principle already laid down, that the boy must learn to read Latin without the intervention of the English language between the word and the idea. Let us have that thought firmly implanted in mind, and then not confuse method with achievement. Yet I will venture to mention one thing that falls under the head of method, because I believe the surest and speediest method must start from it,—namely, that much oral work is necessary, and under this head I will say a few general words about so-called Latin prose composition, and about pronunciation.

I do firmly hold as an article of personal faith that the boy cannot easily be taught to read without a great deal more of oral work than used to be fashionable. Now by oral work I do not mean simply the recitation of paradigms of all sorts, although I do believe in that, and in a good deal of it. But if the boy is to be Romanized, he must from the threshold of his learning become practically familiar with what is a thoroughly scientific principle, that language is primarily a thing of the tongue and ear, aided by the gesticulating finger and observing eye, and not a thing of the slow-moving pen, that it is an immediate and kindling appeal straight from one man to another ; and that the written word is only a representative of the living, spoken word.

Undoubtedly from one point of view, then, the best way of getting the boy to learn Latin would be to drop him down in the middle of ancient Rome and let him grow up there. But ancient Rome is not in existence, and even if it were, the complete result of our experiment would be to create one more Roman, and not that far nobler product that we are after, an American boy with mind broadened and quickened by an acute sympathy with and knowledge of the Romans.

Well, then, shall we try to teach him even in this late and foreign land to speak Latin like his mother-tongue, and so make the language live again in him? But can this be done, even if it be desirable? I am afraid that within the years of his school-life we should not have time to teach him much of anything else. We might better spend our time in teaching him to speak English,—for I do not believe nine persons out of ten can ever, within ordinary limitations as to time, learn readily to speak a foreign language except among a people who speak it. What we can do with our

boy is to train him to understand Latin,—at any rate, literary Latin,—and it is Latin literature we are pressing forward to,—when he does hear it. Everybody knows that the ordinary child will understand a far better style of speech than he can himself utter. And so the boy can learn to have the foreign words picture themselves to his mind immediately, and not intermediately, in the natural order of the language, as it flows from the speaker's lips, even though he cannot perfectly reproduce those pictures in similar language without previous preparation. That is, the power of composition, of reproduction, will inevitably, save for a few, lag behind the power of comprehension. But it must not drop out of sight altogether, as it seems prone to do, so far as I can judge from the condition of the average boy who comes to college. He may be able to write out a fine translation of a passage of Latin previously unseen, though in all probability, if the examiner should read the passage to him, he would find it nothing but a jumble of meaningless sounds. But he makes awful work of writing out in Latin a simple passage of previously unseen English. And yet that boy has had the usual amount of training in Latin composition. The trouble is just here, that his training in Latin composition has not gone right along with his other training in Latin from first to last. He has learned all his prose composition, with the exception of certain exercises laid down in black and white in his first lesson-book, from a book on Latin prose composition, which had set passages and copious grammatical references. As a result, whenever he has to express an idea of—purpose, let us say— he tries to think of a particular lesson in his book, or of the wording of § 376*a* of the grammar, and to cipher out his verb-form accordingly. And yet it ought to be as instinctive an act to him,—that utterance of the, 'say, subjunctive form under those circumstances,—as the choice of the word 'sun' rather than 'moon' to indicate the orb of day. This instinctively correct use of the language that springs from an inner grasp of it can be cultivated only by oral drill every day, from the very beginning, in the expression in Latin of ideas based on those presented by the Latin text that day studied. In the very first days of the study this exercise will, of course, be extremely simple, but it will tend in the same direction as the more complex and varied exercises possible later,—that of making the boy think in Latin without the intervention of English.

The form of the question on the very first lesson is not a matter of no importance, or of slight importance. Ask the boy what the Latin word for 'table' is, and you start him off on one track : ask him what a Roman said when he wanted his friend to think of that sort of a thing [pointing], and you start him off on another. By the first form you prompt him to think of an equation between two words ; by the second, of an equation between a word and an idea. And the second form is the keynote of the best training,—I had wellnigh said of the only effective training,—in so-called composition. It is surprising in how short a time the boy can learn to express whole sentences, and then series of sentences, orally, without previous specific preparation of anything except the given modicum of Latin text. I should not advise the indefinite postponement of the careful *preparation* of translations into Latin from set passages of English, yet such translations need be only occasional, and should not take the place of this spontaneous work of every day.

But I am in danger of overrunning your patience and my time. I must say a few hurried words about the matter of pronunciation. I have been pleading the necessity of much oral work, of continual translation at hearing, as the only means of learning to understand Latin as the Romans understood it, in the order as well as in the character of the thought. Now this presupposes some consistently intelligible scheme of pronunciation, though it does not determine what that scheme should be. I will only remark that it is idle to try to read Latin verse with anything but a purely quantitative scheme of pronunciation. What a miserable wreck does Vergil's stately measure become when waltzed through in triple instead of quadruple time ! And how can the boy, when he comes to Horace, have the slightest conception of what a logaoedic rhythm really is, if he has never learned to read a dactyl correctly. As well talk to a blind man about the beautiful colors of the autumn leaves, as to him about the peculiar rhythmic ripple of cyclic dactyls in trochaic measures. But how few teachers ever make quantity a real thing to their pupils, or give them any training in the proper reading of so simple a metre as the dactylic hexameter ? How can they accomplish anything in this direction if they allow the boy for the first year or two to think the rules of quantity invented only for the sake of determining the position of the accent, and then, when he comes to Vergil,

make him learn page after page of so-called 'rules' of quantity in detail, as if they had to do with poetry only? What wonder that he thinks Latin verse simply a very ingenious, semi-mathematical puzzle? But if the first words that he learns from the lips of his teacher, and all subsequent words, are correctly pronounced, and his attention called to the necessity of precise imitation, he will never need to study those tedious rules and lists of exceptions at the end of his grammar. He will pronounce words correctly as by second nature. And when he comes to Vergil he will read the verses correctly without any study of the metre, because the long and short syllables in proper time and proper succession run from his tongue naturally, just as he learned to pronounce the words in his first year at the language. Let us have quantitative pronunciation, then, from the first, not for the sake of archæological correctness, but of practical utility.

I have thus said that the training in Latin for the sake of culture must begin with the beginning of work in Latin; that the immediate aim must be to make the boy live and think and feel after the Roman fashion; that the first door to this is by training him in the ability to understand the Latin language at sight and hearing without even a mental translation of it into English; and that the best method to this end demands much oral work, daily drill in the expression in Latin of ideas based on those of the passage set for the day's reading, and constant observance of quantity in oral reading.

In all these matters the teacher needs to cultivate in himself correctness, swiftness and precision of judgment,—but all this will be of little avail if he cannot rouse within himself that keen delight in his work, that element of enthusiasm, which his pupils cannot help catching. If he lack that, he need hope for no marked success in this field. The most perfect system is but a graven image, cold and expressionless, if it lacks the vital spark of enthusiasm which alone can make it a living soul.

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